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FM AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1223  
INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0050  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0067  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0078

UNCLAS BUJUMBURA 000587

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

LONDON, PARIS, PLEASE PASS TO AF WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BY](#)  
SUBJECT: GOB ELIMINATES POLITICAL MEETING RESTRICTIONS

REF: A. BUJUMBURA 515  
[1](#)B. BUJUMBURA 558

[1](#)1. (SBU) In a November 18 reversal, Minister of the Interior Venant Kamana canceled an October 6 Ministerial Ordinance that severely restricted the right of political parties to meet freely (ref A). The new ordinance requires political parties to simply inform local authorities three days in advance of a meeting; the previous ordinance required governmental approval to assemble. Additionally, the new ordinance no longer requires political parties to accept attendance by security or other governmental "representatives" at such meetings. Political parties from across the spectrum welcomed the decision to cancel the original ordinance.

[1](#)2. (SBU) COMMENT: Apparently acknowledging his overzealousness, ruling-party member Kamana bowed to vocal and sustained protests from the diplomatic corps, media, civil society, and all political parties to lift the restrictions on the rights of political parties to meet freely. In a private conversation November 5 with an Embassy official, Kamana sheepishly admitted that the new ordinance had gone too far and that he needed to find a way to repeal it. Similarly the ruling-party spokesman told PolOff in late October that his party did not need the ordinance to be competitive in the upcoming elections. Combined with local and international concern over the detention of prominent journalist and politician Alexis Sinduhije (ref B - he was since charged with insulting the President) on the pretext of holding an illegal political meeting, one of several recent questionable maneuvers by the Government of Burundi (GOB) to silence the opposition, canceling the ordinance is a step in the democratic direction. Nevertheless, with the continued detention of prominent journalists and other opposition leaders, it is too early to conclude that the GOB is committed to allowing constructive dissent. END COMMENT.  
Moller